FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
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AN ANALYSIS OF:
THE ROLE OF THE STUDENT TEACHER IN THE CO-TAUGHT CLASSROOM

A critique of a research report submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the course EDF5481

To
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by
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***** NOTE to Fall 2014 Students: I highlighted in RED important elements that should
be included in your critique, such as references to the textbook, in the sample it was
Creswell instead of Fraenkel, and the various sections (Introduction, Lit Review,
Measurement, Sampling, etc….) ****
Introduction and Related Literature

Michele Wilson Kamens and Diane Casale-Giannola at the Educational Department of Rider University; a private campus located in Lawrenceville, Mercer County, New Jersey, co-authored a qualitative research study on *The Role of the Student Teacher in the Co-Taught Classroom.* This study is of special significance to me, since I too experienced the same methodology of student teaching in an inclusive co-taught classroom setting.

The federal law No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, H.R. 1 (NCLB), mandates public school systems to not only comply in providing a free and appropriate education to school age children, in the United States; but all children must be encompassed in every aspect of schooling. This includes children with disabilities whether they are labeled LD (learning disabled) or not; brining about the co-taught paradigm. Making my critique of this scholarly article of personal importance; endeavoring to investigate if it meets and assures standards of rigor and professional integrity, as well as my interpretation of accuracy, comprehensiveness and critical appraisal.

Research Problem

Thomas Alva Edison said, “I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.” Research is an ongoing, ever changing endeavor, helping us to: 1) improve policy and practice; 2) inform policy and practice; 3) address gaps in knowledge; and 4) broaden our perspectives (Creswell, 2005). The first step embarked by researchers is to identify a research problem, “[i]dentifying the research problem consists of specifying an issue to study” (Creswell, 2005); by doing so, it sets the stage for clearly establishing the
importance of this study; while addressing deficiencies, and revealing why it is relevant to a targeted audience.

In my critique of this article, I found Kamens and Giannola precisely pointed out their research problem, gave justification for the research, and addressed the audience. The article, *The Role of the Student Teacher in the Co-Taught Classroom* focuses on the changing roles of student (preservice) teachers being placed in an inclusive classroom setting, where the application of a co-teaching model is employed. Kamens and Giannola did not provide a theoretical basis for this research; but does a need exist? And is there justification for this study? They pointed out, “[a]s more students with disabilities are receiving instruction in general education classrooms, the practice of co-teaching has increased as a service delivery model” (Austin, 2001).

The researchers located deficiencies in past studies and shortcomings in this area of concern; not only between special education and regular education teachers, but among the educational community as a whole. “However, a review of the recent research on inclusion and collaboration at the university level yields almost no information that examines the experiences of preservice teachers, particularly student teachers, in co-taught inclusive classrooms” (Kamens, 2004).

Kamens and Giannola reviewed previous and existing literature to not only justify their research, but to stress the value of their research study for all educators. They cite numerous reports to emphasis and add credence to their study, as well as to document the need for this report. They mention, “[a]lthough teachers may believe that co-teaching has the potential to be a viable model for effective instruction, many feel that they have not been adequately prepared to co-teach” (Austin, 2001). Also noting, with “[t]he practice of
Role of Student Teacher

inclusion continuing to grow, in the United States, approximately 75% of students with disabilities are educated in general education classrooms” (U.S. Department of Education, 2000); the justification for this study is warranted and the researchers presented their case clearly, focused and comprehensible to the reader.

Lastly, I must take into consideration, if there exist internal and/or external threats in validity. Researchers design studies so as to minimize compromises in drawing good conclusions from the data (scores) they obtain (Creswell, 2005). “A threat to validity means design issues may threaten the experiment so that conclusions reached from the data may provide a false reading about probable cause and effect between the treatment and outcome” (Creswell, 2005). I noted inconsistencies and possible hindrance in the selection of participants; this may lead to threats in external validity, which I will elaborate further in the sampling section of this critique.

Method

This section in a qualitative research study is also referred to as the procedures section, which include: rationale for the qualitative approach; sample(s) and site(s); access and permission(s); data gathering strategies; and data analysis approach (Creswell, 2005).

In reporting this study, Kamens and Giannola sub headed “Procedures” under the title heading of “Methods” giving individual attention to these two key features. Kamens and Giannola stated, “[t]he framework for this qualitative study is based on the concept of participant observation in ethnographic research” (Kamens, 2004). “Ethnographic designs are qualitative procedures for describing, analyzing, and interpreting a cultural
group’s shared patterns of behavior, beliefs, and language that develop over time” (Creswell, 2005).

The researchers will serve “as participant observers in these inclusive classrooms” (Kamens, 2004). Kamens’ and Giannola’s role was of “ethnographic observers, they focused on the co-teaching interactions and culture in the various classroom and school settings (Kamens, 2004). They deem, “[u]sing this methodology, we were able to discern ‘mutually understood sets of expectations and explanations that enable us to interpret what is occurring and what meanings are probably being attributed by others present’ (Wolcott, as cited in Jaeger, 1988, p.193) in these classrooms” (Kamens, 2004). By assuming a “participant” role in conducting their study, the researchers were actively scrutinizing the “co-teaching interactions and cultures in the various classrooms and school setting” (Kamens, 2004).

As a result of the researchers being personally engaged in this study; meaning “[t]o truly learn about a situation, you become involved in activities at the research site,” Kamens and Giannola rendered a detailed humanistic viewpoint of all the participants involved; and in doing so they “offer excellent opportunities to see experiences from the views of participants” (Creswell, 2005).

**Measurement**

In conducting qualitative studies it requires researchers to investigate a central phenomenon; the measurements, or tools, used in these studies are quite different than quantitative studies which necessitate identifying independent and dependent variables, assessing the impact of those variables on an outcome, testing theories, and calculating for correlational and/or statistical formulas. In *The Role of the Student Teacher in the Co-*
Taught Classroom, the focus lay on exploring the views of the participants; generating themes based on the participant’s perspectives and obtaining detailed information. Qualitative researchers probe a problem by conducting interviews and use forms with general, emerging questions; this allows participants to render detailed and focus responses. In this study, Kamens and Giannola employed various measuring tools; focus groups, interviews, student teacher journals, supervisor field notes, and questionnaires endeavoring to explore, in depth, the impact of new teachers being placed in a co-taught classroom.

Research Design

What impact does placement in a co-taught inclusive classroom structure have on the role of the student teacher? What are the implications of this type of experience for teacher education? Kamens and Giannola choose to answer these questions by conducting a qualitative research study. According to our text, “[q]ualitative research, however, is best suited for research problems in which you do not know the variables and need to explore” (Creswell, 2005). In addition, “[g]ood qualitative reports, however, need to be realistic and persuasive in order to convince the reader that the study is an accurate and credible account” (Creswell, 2005).

Kamens and Giannola answered both of these quandaries effectively and thoroughly and set the stage for future research in this area. They presented a truthful portrayal of their research by analyzing student teachers and collecting data from multiple sources, all in an effort, to bring in different perspectives and insights; this added the human variable to their study. Qualitative studies emerged, in the late 1800’s and developed on through the early 1900’s, as an alternative to quantitative research. Where
as qualitative researchers recognize the importance of listening to the views of participants, conduct research where people live and work and acknowledge the importance in advocating for change and bettering the lives of individuals (Creswell, 2005). Mahatma Gandhi wisely said, “[t]he measure of a country’s greatness should be based on how well it cares for its most vulnerable populations,” and undeniably every effort made by researchers to procure advancement in the field of children’s education “to these our most vulnerable population,” is essential. By employing this approach, Kamens and Giannola generated an in depth exploration of the central phenomenon, as they searched to understand, what impact and experiences does placement in a co-taught setting have, and moreover; how do student teachers fit into this complicated dyad?

**Sampling**

“The Master said, ‘[a] gentleman can see a question from all sides without bias.’ ‘The small man is biased and can see a question only from one side,” (The Analects of Confucius, 1893), this is just one aspect challenging qualitative research studies. In qualitative inquiry, the intent is not to generalize to a population, but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2005). Kamens and Giannola therefore must purposefully and/or intentionally select individuals and sites which can: 1) provides useful information; 2) help people learn about the phenomenon and; 3) give a “voice” to the silenced people (Creswell, 2005). The principal objective and design of qualitative studies is relating accounts as told by the participants in the study. It is, after all, their point of view which researchers seek out; necessitating observations in the natural setting where they express these, their views. Connoting researchers need some measure of prejudice in conducting, analyzing and reporting effective qualitative studies;
for they are observers of the human condition. Kamens and Giannola need to be subjective, inductive and above all partial, to ensure the comprehension of the central phenomenon. They must choose the participant in a biased manner, in order to render a deep understanding of the research problem.

To meet this criterion, Kamens and Giannola choose the members subjectively consisting of: five student teachers; two university supervisors; five assigned cooperating teachers; and six additional co-teaching partners. All participants volunteered for this study, with the added partisanship of “[t]he researchers/participant observers…were university special education faculty, serving as student teacher supervisors for the semester” (Kamens, 2004).

As I reviewed the sampling for this research, I must take into account whether the researchers correctly identified a population? And if so, does the sampling frame properly represent all the population? What were the techniques used and the implication of such; and were there issues with external validity?

I noted in the selection of participants, all cooperating teachers chosen were female; there were no male cooperating teachers in this study. I also observed the ratio of female to male preservice student teachers was 5:1, and secondary preservice student teachers were excluded totally in this study; for what ever reason, the researchers decided not to include male and secondary teachers, Kamens and Giannola did not provide a rational for this quandary. I find this could pose a possible threat in external validity; since the interaction of selection and treatment there could be present an inability to generalize beyond the groups in the experiment (Creswell, 2005).
Data Collection

“Qualitative data collection is more than simply deciding on whether you will observe or interview people” (Creswell, 2005). There is a five step procedure entailed in collecting qualitative data: 1) identify participants and sites; 2) gain access; 3) determine the types of data to collect; 4) develop data collection forms; and 5) administer the process in an ethical manner (Creswell, 2005). Kamens and Giannola selected three elementary and three intermediate schools in suburban areas of central and southern New Jersey; during the fall semester of student teaching. Unfortunately, there is no mention, in this study, of why these precise schools were chosen, how the researchers gained access to these sites and most notably, how they assured the ethical administration, collection and reporting of their study.

Also included in this study was a Co-Teaching Structures table, which detailed each of the student teacher participants with their assigned grade level and classroom structure. “The co-teaching structures comprised various models of teaching: parallel teaching, teach and assist, and team teaching” (Friend & Cook, 2003); and “[t]he student teachers were placed in classrooms from first to sixth grades” (Kamens, 2004). The researchers employed numerous methods of data collection; this included observational notes, interviews with cooperating teachers, focus groups with student teachers, and open-ended surveys, with all data collection being gathered, handled, and conducted first hand.

In the questionnaires, the researchers, required “participants to describe the classroom environment and structure, including the number of students and grade levels,
and the schedule of subjects with co-teaching support in their specific setting” (Kamens, 2004). Included in the questionnaire was “12 open-ended questions related to the advantages and disadvantages of student teaching in the co-taught classroom, the relationships among the cooperating teachers and the student teacher, and the impact this unique setting had on the professional training and development of the student teacher” (Kamens, 2004).

Cooperating teachers were also asked the same open-ended questions, as well as, questions related to the number of years teaching in different settings and amount of support and training received before and during their inclusive co-teaching placements. And most crucial, cooperating teachers were asked open-ended questions regarding the impact on the student teacher in the areas of planning, professionalism, lesson execution/strategies, and confidence (Kamens, 2004).

“Four of the student teachers participated in focus group interview” (Kamens, 2004), the interview questions were the same questions asked in the questionnaires, but here the participants were asked to elaborate even further in an open forum environment; “overall outcomes and challenges were shared.” “The focus interview was recorded and transcribed for analysis” (Kamens, 2004).

**Data Analysis**

“Analyzing qualitative data requires understanding how to make sense of text and images so that you can form answers to your research questions” (Creswell, 2005). The “[f]ocus group transcriptions and questionnaire responses were reviewed by the researchers and initial codes were determined.” The “[u]nits of data were color-coded and organized into a data display based on these initial codes” (Miles & Huberman,
The participants in this study “emphasized (a) the impact of the support they received, (b) the impact of cooperating teacher modeling, (c) the impact on planning, (d) the increased awareness of teacher roles and responsibilities in a co-taught classroom, (e) the confidence they developed from this unique opportunity, and (f) their developing awareness of the elements of co-teaching” (Kamens, 2004).

“Triangulation was accomplished through analysis of these data displays as patterns were found within specific participant groups and then collectively across all groups” (Kamens, 2004). “Themes were developed based on patterns that emerged during triangulation of the data.” “Supervisor field notes, student teacher journals, and student teacher observation were reviewed to support or contradict thematic outcomes” (Kamens, 2004). The themes which emerged from the data were associated to support, planning, modeling, and awareness of the elements necessary for successful co-teaching; but most significantly do they answer the research questions?

Results

For research to be useful certain criteria must be met; the study should have clear results summarized in a concise manner, include data based evidence and most importantly ethical consideration taken throughout the whole process. Kamens and Giannola accurately summarized and presented their results in a well written succinct approach; the major conclusion Kamens and Giannola yielded was, “there is some clear opportunities for professional growth” (Kamens, 2004), in the area of the co-teaching delivery models employed in today’s schools. Also noting “[t]his study indicates a need for future research related to teacher preparation for co-teaching and work in inclusive settings, for both general and special education preservice teachers” (Kamens, 2004). The
researchers bring to light numerous studies which have “focused on teacher preparation related to inclusion philosophies, attitudes, and practices,” but remark that, “there is a need for practical experiences in co-taught and inclusive structures, and to strengthen teacher preparation as it relates to special education laws” (Kamens, 2004).

What impact does placement in a co-taught inclusive classroom structure have on the role of the student teacher? And what are the implications of this type of experience for teacher education? Kamens and Giannola discovered the impact of student teachers’ experiences in a co-taught classroom were positive; “indicating that this was an effective student teaching placement because of the exposure to collaboration and varied teaching styles, ongoing opportunities to plan for diverse needs, and awareness of effective components of co-teaching” (Kamens, 2004).

Additionally, “[p]articipants emphasized the increase support as an advantage” (Kamens, 2004). They discover it was beneficial to have an extra person to aid in lesson planning, behavior management, offer support with the children and time management. Participants also judged the “presence of different practicing teacher with diverse styles and strengths provided opportunities for sharing varied ideas and resources” (Kamens, 2004). Concerns also emerged “related to the student teacher’s ability to independently manage a large group of students with diverse abilities” (Kamens, 2004). As one participant stated, “[t]o be able to see how teachers collaborate in an inclusive setting has taught me a great deal about special and regular education.” “Flexibility is the key!”

As mentioned previously in the data collection section of this critique, the researchers regrettably did not state, how and why, the specific schools utilized in this study were chosen. Also missing is how the researchers gained access to these sites and
most markedly, were assurances utilized in the ethical administration, collection and reporting of their study.

Also noted was the lack of reflexivity, which is to say, the reflections of Kamens’ and Giannola’s own biases, values and assumptions were not mentioned in this study. This entails “discussing personal experiences and identifying how you collaborated with participants during phases of the project” (Creswell, 2005).

Implications of the Findings

As a result of their findings Kamens and Giannola discovered the “placement of student teachers in co-taught classrooms has the potential to provide realistic experiences to help preservice teachers learn about the elements necessary for an effective inclusive classroom” The data uncovered several implications for teacher education programs; primarily the structure of the co-taught classroom has an “impact on the student teacher role.” Kamens and Giannola uncover “[w]ith so many contexts and structures, there are several considerations for teacher educators.”

First being, ascertaining cooperative teachers be properly trained to serve as role models to preservice new student teachers. Second, student teachers can have multiple roles, how are they able to effectively handle these roles; thus creating an intimidating experience for a new student teacher. Also, the number of cooperating teachers and grade levels “can have an impact on the success of this experience,” (Kamens, 2004) creating a confusing and challenging atmosphere. Lastly, the roles and relationship of student teachers in a co-taught setting need to be negotiated. Implying “[a] knowledge base related to communication skills, team interaction, collaboration and co-teaching strategies,” to provide a foundation for student teaching in co-taught classrooms.
My Contribution

Change is unavoidable, it is part of the human fabric and experience nothing is eternal everything changes. Bruce Barton (1886-1967), considered being one of the most influential advertising men of the 20th century, religious author, Congressman, and creator of Betty Crocker shrewdly stated “[a]ction and reaction, ebb and flow, trial and error, change - this is the rhythm of living. Out of our over-confidence, fear; out of our fear, clearer vision, fresh hope. And out of hope, progress.” If we, as an educational community, are to succeed in overcoming the challenges facing education today and secure quality education, for all children, in the future; teachers, policy makers, administrators, parents and finally students must not only confront, but embrace these changes in today’s methods, pedagogy and delivery models of teaching.

What would I change

Reflexivity and ethics, were there gatekeepers? The lack of male and secondary teachers, how and why the schools in this study were chosen, and how did the researchers gain access to these sites? These where questions that where not mentioned or even proposed in this qualitative study; touching upon these issues would have added more credibility and substance.

I am cognizant of the monumental task entailed by researchers in conducting, gathering, evaluating and reporting of proficient qualitative studies, but these are inquiries which should have been answered to complete the purposed study. And in doing so, it would have expanded to offer a higher measure of credibility to this study; by adding increased knowledge, and ultimately culminating in benefiting the reader.

Although, in defense of the researchers, in the conclusion section they mention,
“[g]iven the limited size and diversity of our sample, continued research with other
groups of preservice teachers in co-taught settings, in both general and special education,
is warranted” (Kamens, 2004).

What would I keep

I have not had the opportunity to read an adequate amount of research studies to
gauge the quality of such, to much less critique one. But in following the guidance of the
text book and class lectures, other than the few questions which were not answered by the
researchers, and the unbalanced ratio between male and female participants, I would
preserve this study as is. The format, structure and context of this study is clear, precise
and presented in a form which is interesting, detailed and informative to the reader. This
study is not only current but peer reviewed; which endeavors to render an updated
examination and analysis of the impact of preservice teachers being placed in a co-taught
inclusive classroom setting.

What would I delete

If you follow in others footsteps you will never leave yours behind, but this is
definitely not the case in research studies, one builds upon another, ever expanding,
probing and searching attempting to answer the researcher’s ever challenging questions.
So what would I delete? Nothing…I would expand upon it.
References


